



## Critical Introduction to Volume 3 of *The Dial: An Occasional Publication* (1893)

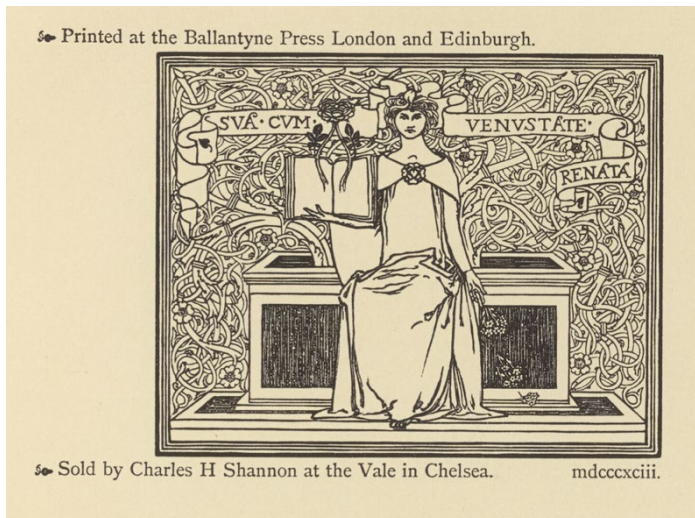


Figure 1. Ballantyne Press Colophon, Designed and Engraved by Charles Ricketts, *Dial* No. 3 (1893)

engraved an elaborate colophon for the press, showing a robed woman seated on a chest holding an open book in one hand and a sheaf of flowers in the other (fig. 1). The Latin logo, *Sua cum venustate renata*, drew attention to “the beauty of their newborn” and highlighted the co-editors’ pride in the aesthetic outcome of their collaborative effort.

In October of 1893, twenty months after bringing out the previous number of their little magazine, [Charles Ricketts](#) and Charles Shannon published the third *Dial*. Typeset and printed at the Ballantyne Press under Ricketts’s direct supervision, the issue was available for purchase from Shannon at their shared home in the Vale, Chelsea. Ricketts designed and

By 1893, *The Dial* was beginning to be more widely recognized by those who appreciated aesthetic and artistic integrity in the making of books. The reviewer for the *Studio* declared that this “sumptuous folio of plates and letterpress is surely the finest magazine in the world,” and went on to hazard that “perhaps no modern journal of so limited a

circulation ever had so much attention awarded it by foreign artists” (“Lay Figure”). Now confident of a committed audience locally and internationally, Ricketts and Shannon increased the print run from 200 to 250 copies and the unit price from 10 shillings and 10 pence to 12 shillings and 6 pence. As they explained in the Prospectus for the new number, the price rise was necessitated by the increase in the number of plates, or full-page images. Although they assured buyers that the price for Volume 4 would return to 10 shillings 10 pence, the remaining volumes of *The Dial* continued to be sold at the higher amount.

While the third issue has ten full-page images compared to the previous issue’s six, it has far fewer textual decorations: three wood-engraved initial letters and a single tailpiece comprise its only ornaments (see [Database of Ornament](#)). Also noteworthy is the editorial decision to include three pen-and-ink drawings reproduced by photomechanical process engraving after the second number had deliberately featured nothing but original artist prints. *Dial* No. 3 has a total of six original artist prints: three wood engravings—one each by Charles Shannon, Lucien Pissarro, and T. Sturge Moore—and three lithographs by Shannon. The wood-engraved frontispiece was a collaborative effort between artist and artisan: Reginald Savage created the design as “an experiment in line” and [Ricketts](#) drew and engraved it on the woodblock. The three pen-and-ink illustrations by Ricketts (2) and Savage (1) were reproduced by Emery Walker’s highly regarded firm, Boutall and Walker, and printed on Japanese paper to allow for the highest detail in printing. As the *Sketch* critic noted appreciatively, the *Dial* artists were attentive to the possibilities of both medium and reproduction technology: “they show a distinct appreciation of the technique required by the medium they use, so that pen-drawings are unlike the etchings, the lithographs and woodcuts are unlike either” (Theocritus IV.—Reginald Savage).

Two of the full-page images—Shannon’s wood-engraved illustration for the Vale edition of *Daphnis and Chloe*, “The Topmost Apple,” and Ricketts’s pen-and-ink design for [Oscar Wilde’s](#) *The Sphinx*, “In the Thebaid”—were printed in coloured ink. Brought out by [Elkin Mathews](#) and John Lane at the Bodley Head in 1893 and forthcoming in 1894 respectively, these designs perform the paradoxical roles of art for art’s sake and

commercial advertisement for an illustrated book. But it might equally be said that *Daphnis and Chloe* functioned as an advertisement for *The Dial*. As the reviewer for *The Spectator* observed, the beautifully designed book would spark a new interest in the little magazine, which had heretofore not been “at all widely known,” due to “the evasive manner of its publication, and the forbidding character of a literature too closely modelled on the mysteries of Blake” ([Rev. of \*Daphnis and Chloe\*](#)).

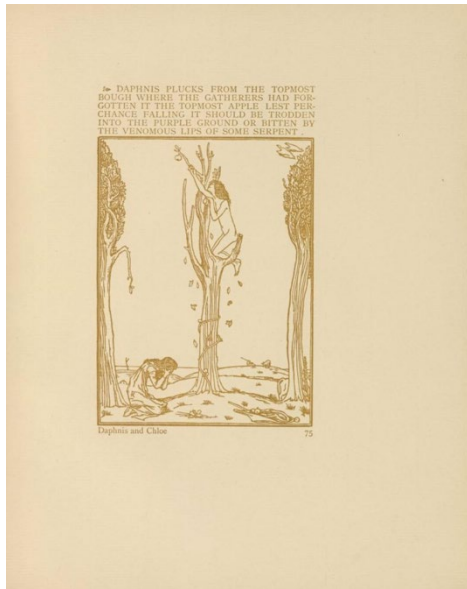


Figure 2. Charles Shannon, “The Topmost Apple,” Illustration for *Daphnis and Chloe*, *Dial* No. 3 (1893)

Reproduced as a proof from the recently published book, Shannon’s “The Topmost Apple” features the letterpress printed in caps above the ruled image and the title, “Daphnis and Chloe,” and page number (75) appearing below, all printed in gold-brown ink. Ricketts and Shannon wanted their first book, *Daphnis and Chloe*, to be a complete work of art displaying self-conscious design from cover to cover, just as their magazine did. Like the *Dial*, the book was printed on a hand press and aimed to revive original wood engraving as an art form. To ensure the harmony of type and image, and also to express symbolic and emotional meaning, Shannon’s figures are thin and attenuated, set within a landscape that evokes decorative design rather than earthly representation. Perhaps alluding to the wood-engraving’s title, the *Spectator* critic hailed *Daphnis and Chloe* as “one of the finest fruits of the revival of book-making” ([Rev. of \*Daphnis and Chloe\*](#)).





Figure 3. Charles Shannon, "A Romantic Landscape," *Dial* no. 3 (1893)

The fruit motif repeats throughout the volume's plates and letterpress. In Shannon's beautiful lithograph, "A Romantic Landscape," a group of women rest on the ground of an apple orchard, with embracing lovers in the distance encircled in a halo of light (fig. 3).

Shannon also painted this subject in water-colour; a halftone print of the painting appears in the first [Pageant](#), which Shannon edited with [Gleeson White](#) in 1896. In contrast, "The

Intruder" is a comic scene in which a naked child, seated by a hamper of

spilling fruit, looks apprehensively toward a rooster that has just entered the scene. Shannon's other original lithograph, "White Nights," looks into a bedroom where three women are preparing for night (fig. 4). One, likely the servant, is making up a bed, while the other two stand in their night dresses by the wash basin, kissing. A candle held by one of the women illuminates the scene and radiates out of a background mirror, as if to sanctify the possibility of same-sex love. "White Nights" appears to be a companion

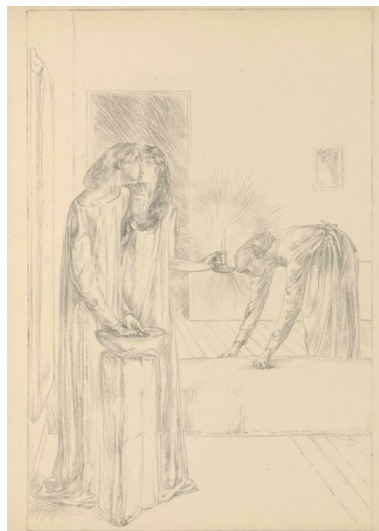


Figure 4. Charles Shannon, "White Nights," *Dial* No. 3 (1893)

piece to "White Watch," which was later published in the first volume of [The Pageant](#). *The Studio* critic called Shannon's three lithographs for the third *Dial* "exquisitely dainty" ("Lay-Figure") and the *Spectator* declared that "for poetic charm in the design and artistic treatment of the medium no more beautiful lithographs than his have been recently produced" ([Rev. of Daphnis and Chloe](#)).

Keen to cover the latest trends, the *Sketch*, an illustrated weekly of "art and actuality," did more than any other magazine in England to promote the work of Shannon and his *Dial* colleagues. Launching a four-part series on "The

Vale Artists” in early 1895, the self-styled “Theocritus” devoted an essay apiece to the art of Shannon, [Ricketts](#), Lucien Pissarro, and Reginald Savage, in that order. Hailing Shannon as “the greatest English lithographer of the present time,” Theocritus reproduced “A Romantic Landscape” to “indicate the charm of his work which, from inscription to completion, passes through no hand save his own” (Theocritus, I.-Charles Shannon).



Figure 5. “Centaur.” Drawn and Engraved on the Wood by Charles Ricketts after a Design by Reginald Savage, *Dial* No. 3 (1893)

Theocritus introduced Reginald Savage to the *Sketch* audience as “the least well-known of the illustrators of the *Dial*” (IV.—Reginald Savage). Despite Savage’s relatively low profile outside the Vale, the editors allotted him top spot in Volume 3, with his leading design for “Centaur” (fig. 5). Described as “an experiment in line,” Savage’s image was drawn and engraved on the wood by Ricketts in

a joint effort demonstrating not only the *Dial*’s collaborative practices, but also its interest in hybrid forms. Both the choice of subject for the frontispiece and the complexity of its imaginative rendering are significant. The wood-engraving depicts a fantastic scene that combines a built environment with natural features such as a waterfall, grotto, and pool, where centaurs of various ages and sexes disport themselves. The domestic life of centaurs is revealed within a little wooden hut in the left corner, wherein a female centaur suckles an infant centaur kneeling on her lap. Another female centaur, with long, beautiful hair and decorative devices adorning her head and body, appears to be working at a distaff, making a long banner that swirls out over the grotto where male centaurs swim, wrestle, and play at archery.

As a frontispiece for the *Dial*, “Centaur” directed readers forward to the long essay on Gustave Moreau in the volume, published by [Ricketts](#) under the name Charles Sturt.

Moreau and other French Symbolists celebrated these mythic creatures in various ways; in England the “cult of the centaur” centred on [Charles Ricketts](#) and his circle (Woodring 9). According to Carl Woodring, centaurs for Ricketts represented “not a crude union of spiritual and bestial, but a cohesion of the intellectual, spiritual, and physical—man made whole by artistry, the transcendency of art over nature” (10). As a hybrid, marginal creature, the centaur became a symbol for the abnormality of the artist, just as abnormality “became in the 1890s integral to art as decorative treatment” (ibid.). Expressing the urgent need for art to stand outside the commercial concerns and narrow values of modern life, decoration and design take unnatural forms in *The Dial* throughout its print run. Introduced in Ricketts’s (Unsigned) [essay on Maurice de Guerin](#) and the elaborate wood-engraved headpiece he designed on the subject for *The Dial*’s second volume in 1892, centaurs remain an important presence through to the magazine’s fifth issue of 1897. In this final volume, Ricketts published T. Sturge Moore’s translation of de Guerin’s “The Centaur,” illustrated with his original wood-engraving, “Centaur with a bough.”



Figure 6. T. Sturge Moore, Wood-engraved tailpiece of Greek Girls Dancing, *Dial* No. 3 (1893)

Asserting art’s a-temporality, classical myth weaves throughout the third volume of the *Dial*. Immediately following the “Centaur” frontispiece is Moore’s long narrative poem, “Danaë,” which tells the story of the ill-fated titular character, raised from infancy in an impenetrable tower to ensure she remained a virgin, in a vain attempt to thwart the prophecy that her son would kill her father, King Acrisius. After Zeus enters the tower in a golden shower, Danaë bears Perseus, who does indeed grow up to slay his grandfather. In 1903 Moore’s *Danaë: A Poem*, with three wood-engraved illustrations by Ricketts, became the last Vale Press book to be published by Hacon and Ricketts. Moore also contributed a wood-engraving on a pagan theme, “Pan Mountain,” to the third *Dial*, as well as six short lyrics. He punctuates “Chorus of Greek Girls, Vase E. 783 BM,” an ekphrastic poem on the painted frieze on a piece of pottery in the British Museum, with the only wood-engraved tailpiece in the volume (fig. 6).



[Ricketts](#)'s reproduced pen drawing, "And you will see Ariadne Gazing at her Sister Phaedra who Hangs by a Rope," references the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. The image was reprinted in Volume 1 of [The Pageant](#) (1896) in an essay by Gleeson White celebrating Ricketts's work (85). His design for Wilde's *The Sphinx*, "In the Thebaid," focuses on the mythical hybrid creature with human face, eagle's wings, and lion's body, walking through stone pillars toward a ruined statue. Savage's pen drawing, "The Lotos-Eaters," alludes to Tennyson's poem based on the incident in *The Odyssey* when the hero's men had to be dragged back to their ship and chained, after they ate the dangerous flower and fell into a blissful trance (fig. 7). Calling attention to the "power of imaginative treatment" displayed in the image, *Sketch* critic Theocritus compares it favourably to the most famous illustrated book of the 1860s: "Surely, since the Moxon Tennyson was published, few designs could be found showing as much concentration in workmanship and thought as this little drawing" (IV.-Reginald Savage).



Figure 7. Reginald Savage, "The Lotos-Eaters," *Dial* No. 3 (1893)

With pen-and-ink work like Savage's, and an ongoing interest in the relationships between word and image, art and nature, and matter and spirit, the *Dial* carried the Pre-Raphaelite tradition into the world of fin-de-siècle little magazines. [John Gray's](#) essay on Garth Wilkinson (1812-1899), explicitly connects this homeopathic doctor, social reformer, and philosopher with a nineteenth-century tradition running from William Blake to the Pre-Raphaelites, partly through his translations of and essays on the pluralistic-Christian theologian Emanuel

Swedenborg (1688-1772), and partly through his own visionary poetry. "His collection of poems, *Improvisations from the Spirit* (1857)," Gray writes, are comparable with Blake's poetry and "attracted the attention of Rossetti" (21). Citing Wilkinson's "two poles of expression," Gray offers extracts from his poems "Madness" and "Solitude" (22).



Figure 8. Lucien Pissarro, “Solitude,” *Dial* No. 3 (1893)

Highlighting a contemporary interpretation of the latter pole of expression, the editors placed Lucien Pissarro’s woodcut, “Solitude,” between signatures in the middle of Gray’s essay (fig. 8). Seated on a hill above a town in a Breton countryside, a young woman is shown absorbed in the book she holds on her lap, disengaged from the busy life around her and alone in the alternative world of words. In his essay on Pissarro for the *Sketch*, Theocritus suggests the French artist’s work “has something of the artistic spontaneity which characterized Blake in his lighter moods, notably the ‘Songs of Innocence’” (III.—Lucien Pissarro). The comparison of Pissarro with Blake is an interesting one. In 1894 Lucien and Esther Pissarro founded the Eragny Press, where they produced their own version of the illuminated books created by William and Catherine Blake, using the method of wood-engraving and three-colour printing rather than etching and hand-colouring.

[John Gray’s](#) other contribution to *Dial* no. 3 was a hymn translated from the Italian of St. Francis Assisi. The lyric describes a metaphysical assault and union with Christ, with “Love setteth me a-burning” its incrementally powerful refrain (31-2). With its fusion of the sensuous and the spiritual, this symbolic poem is in keeping with the volume’s Pre-Raphaelite proclivities. The issue’s only work of short fiction, Moore’s “Old Kitty,” connects thematically with a Pre-Raphaelite interest in women’s sexuality, but also, in its treatment, with a fascination with the quotidian details of women’s daily lives shown in Shannon’s “[A Simple Story](#)” in the first issue of *The Dial*. Perhaps also linking to Pissarro’s “Solitude,” Old Kitty lives alone, high on a hill ablaze with sunflowers, exemplifying the life encapsulated in the epigraph from the seventeenth-century fabulist La Fontaine: “*Femme qui n’a filé toute sa vie, /Tâche à passer bien des choses sans bruit*” —loosely, the woman who has stayed in one place all her life, quietly endures without noise.

Overall, the third number of the *Dial* was a masterpiece of art, literature, and book-making—totally unlike anything currently in the market. No wonder that Pissarro, coming from France to England expressly to meet [Ricketts](#) and Shannon, was amazed to discover “that the Continent had been the first to recognize the Vale and its workers,”



and that the artists were virtually unknown in England (Theocritus III.—Lucien Pissarro). Although foreign artists may have been the first to appreciate *The Dial*, however, by 1893 the little magazine was gaining sympathy with its views closer to home as well. As the “Lay Figure” for the *Studio* declared, “the [third] number, whether you do, or do not, sympathise with the ideas so ably set forth by pen and pencil, is a unique instance of the exceeding vitality of art which is essentially English, although it appears an exotic to the man in the street.” In defining their art as “essentially English,” the critic evoked the little magazine’s Pre-Raphaelite roots: “Fantastic, imaginative, and bizarre, the illustrations to *The Dial* are firstly art, and almost equally literature” (114). Their rising fame did not, however, incite the *Dial*’s editors to bring out the next issue quickly. As Theocritus observed: “they have enough experience and knowledge of the world to take their success quietly, and not to allow it either to turn their heads from the ideals they have ever truly followed or their hands from the labour in which they delight” (IV.—Reginald Savage). It would be three years before Ricketts and Shannon put the fourth *Dial* before the public in 1896. And when they did, it would be under the imprimatur of the newly founded Vale Press, established by Charles Ricketts with business partner Llewellyn Hacon (1860-1910).

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